(Washington, DC) — U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) today joined fellow members of the New Democrat Coalition and New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg in urging Congress to take action on measures that would encourage rapid nationwide implementation of health information technology.

The New Dems unveiled a roadmap that will guide their efforts to achieve a fully interoperable health information technology exchange by 2018 with adoption by at least 75 percent of providers. The New Dems also met with Mayor Bloomberg to discuss the successful transition that New York City is making from paper records to safe, secure electronic health records.

"Through my work in the health care field, I have seen firsthand the potential for savings and gains in quality of care that can be achieved through health IT adoption. For every dollar we invest in health IT, we could realize $41 in savings – in addition to saving thousands of lives and preventing innumerable medical errors," Altmire said. **"States, localities, and our nation's hospitals are already leading efforts to implement health IT on their own. Congress needs to take action now to ensure we establish national standards on interoperability and privacy, so we can move toward universal use of health IT."**

Broad implementation of health IT will help improve safety, quality, access to information, public health, and patient involvement. In the broader context of health reform, universal implementation of health IT can help effectively reach the ultimate goal of meaningful health coverage for every American. The RAND Corporation estimates widely implemented, interoperable, and effectively employed health IT could save the U.S. $147 billion per year in increased efficiency, decreased hospitalizations, and decreased medical errors.

Representing the largest payer of health care in the United States, Congress must pass legislation to facilitate a firm infrastructure, standards, and financing system to solidify our long term commitment to health IT.

Infrastructure:

- Codify the HHS office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.

- Create a public-private entity to develop and recommend national standards for the electronic exchange of health information.
- Create a legal framework for health record data banks.
- Cover fees to participate in health record data bank for Medicare, Medicaid and SCHIP enrollees.
- Develop and test quality measures to promote telemedicine.

Standards:

- Establish clear, comprehensive national standards for a health IT network, including specific standards on interoperability, privacy and security of health information, telemedicine, public health use, and chronic disease management.
- Require the first report of standards for health IT implementation in public programs, including Medicare, Medicaid and SCHIP, to be submitted to Congress by January 1, 2010.

- Create a framework that permits medical information to be shared between relevant providers but allows patients to opt out and to request a copy of their record when so desired.

- Put in place strong remedies for violations of privacy protections and establish standards on patient consent that facilitate efficiency through data sharing.

Financing:

- Create appropriate incentives for providers, small and large, that will bring costs in line with benefits and allow a transition to begin.
- Support a mix of incentives, including grants, loans, and tax incentives to encourage faster technology implementation.
- Target incentives in public programs, like Medicare, that encourage effective use of technology in improving care and health outcomes.
- Support spreading the cost of nationwide health IT implementation among all stakeholders who stand to gain financially from its existence.